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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [OPRC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: June 1, 2009

Summary: Reports of "penetration of security forces in Kalam after securing Mingora city" made front-page headlines in most major dailies on Monday. All newspapers reported that the "government asked IDPs from Buner to return to their homes, as all militants had been flushed out of the area." The government's decision to "increase defense budget by 15.5 percent" for the upcoming financial year was also highlighted. Some major dailies underscored Pakistan's Defense Secretary Athar Ali's remarks that the "Swat operation will be completed in two to three days." The closure of Iranian border with Pakistan following a bomb explosion in a mosque in Zahedan (Iran) received prominent coverage. Also highlighted was statement of Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz anticipating that "Taliban are eyeing Punjab."

Most major dailies ran editorials on the fallouts of the ongoing military operation in Swat against the militancy and extremism. The center-right national English daily "The Nation," noted that "there is an urgent need to repatriate the IDPs if the government wishes to avert a much severer crisis emerging from the camps presently housing them." The popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf," avowed that "it is clear now that the militants in NWFP have backing of foreign agencies and forces, and Afghan soil is being used as launching pad against Pakistan." The pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam," opined that the "big powers don't want to end insurgency in this part of the world, if truth be told, they are interested in fanning this uprising, so that those who are opposing their (big powers') agenda remained engaged in their own conflicts." End Summary.

News Stories

"27 Taliban Killed In Swat, Waziristan" "Daily Times" (06/01)

"Security forces said on Sunday that they had entered Kalam after securing Mingora, as 27 militants were killed in different clashes in Swat and South Waziristan. The Army said one officer and eight soldiers lost their lives and six other were injured in different clashes with the Taliban."

"Humanitarian Situation Grave In Mingora" "Dawn" (06/01)

"Thousands of people, who have been suffering severe hardships without water, electricity, gas and food for over a month, started streaming out of the area when the authorities announced a six-hour curfew relaxation on Sunday, for the first time in 10 days."

"IDPs From Buner Told To Return Home" "Dawn" (06/01)

"The government claimed on Sunday that all militants had been flushed out of Buner and asked people of the area to return to their homes. According to an official announcement issued by the Interior Ministry, government officials have also been asked to return to their posts and resume work."

"Defense Spending To Go Up By 15.5pc" "The Nation" (06/01)

"The government has decided to increase the defense budget by 15.5 percent for the upcoming financial year 2009-10 as Rs 342 billion has been earmarked for the military needs. With the raise of 15.5 percent, the overall defense expenses will be increased amounting to Rs 46 billion in the budget volume."

"Swat Operation To End In 2-3 Days" "Daily Times" (06/01)

"The military operation in Swat will be completed in two to three days, Secretary of Defense Syed Athar Ali said on Sunday. Speaking at a security summit in Singapore and talking to Reuters later for an interview, Ali said the military operation in Swat had 'met almost complete success', with only 5 percent to 10 percent of the job remaining."

"Iran Shuts Border At Taftan" "Dawn" (06/01)

"Iran has closed its border with Pakistan at Taftan and informed the Pakistani government about its decision. A Pakistani official confirmed on Sunday that the Iranian authorities had closed the border. Iran had closed the border partially on Thursday after a suicide bomber attacked a mosque in Zahedan, but ordered complete closure on Saturday."

"Taliban Eyeing Punjab, Says Shahbaz" "The News" (06/01)

"As the Pakistan Army has intensified its operations against the Taliban in Swat and its adjoining areas, Punjab Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif has said the aim of the militants is to 'penetrate' into the Punjab. 'There is no doubt that one of their aims is to penetrate into the Punjab as well as to stop the operation in Swat,' Shahbaz Sharif told The Sunday Times."

"Taliban Grooming Teens As Suicide Bombers: Report" "The News" (06/01)

"After the Army launched an operation to flush them out of Swat, the Taliban went from house to house, demanding a boy or a young man from each family for grooming them as suicide bombers, a media report said on Sunday."

"Taliban Attack School In Hangu, Kill Employee" "Daily Times" (06/01)

"Taliban on Sunday attacked Army Public School in Hangu, killed a school employee and abducted three persons including two policemen."

"31 Killed In SWA Clashes" "The News" (06/01)

"Twenty-five militants, including a senior commander of Baitullah Mehsud-led Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Miraj Burki, and six soldiers were killed and several others injured in the deadly clashes between the militants and security forces in the South Waziristan Agency (SWA) tribal region on Sunday night."

"34 Suspects Held In DI Khan" "The News" (06/01)

"Police arrested 34 suspects in the Noon Nawab area in the jurisdiction of the Gomal University police station on Sunday. The police conducted raids on the suspected hideouts and arrested 34 suspects. Thirty of them belong to the Mehsud tribe, while the other four are locals."

"Military Seeks 'Hardcore' Taliban" "Daily Times" (06/01)

"Pakistan Army says it is preparing to flush out 'hardcore' Taliban from Swat valley after regaining control of Mingora. 'We are going

after the leadership and we are going to take care of all the militants in the valley,' spokesman Maj Gen Athar Abbas told the BBC."

"N-Weapons Safe, Says Official" "Dawn" (06/01)

"Pakistan was confident its nuclear assets would not fall into militant hands because it was constantly reviewing security and getting help from friendly countries, Defense Secretary Athar Ali said on Sunday. 'To talk of this falling into the wrong hands ... even the locations will not be known,' Mr. Ali told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the security conference in Singapore."

"ICRC Gravely Concerned At Swat Situation" "Daily Times" (06/01)

"Senior Red Cross officials said on Sunday they were 'gravely concerned' over the humanitarian situation in Swat. 'The organization is gravely concerned about the plight of civilians in Swat and believes their situation demands a prompt and comprehensive humanitarian response,' said a statement released from the ICRC's Geneva headquarters."

"Pakistan May Have Second Strike N-Capability: Report" "Daily Times" (06/01)

"Pakistan may have developed a second-strike capability - and nuclear parity with India - a US Congressional report has suggested. 'Pakistan has reportedly addressed issues of survivability through second strike capability, possible hard and deeply buried storage and launch facilities, road-mobile missiles, air defenses around strategic sites, and concealment measures,' the Congressional Research Service (CRS) said in a May 15 report to lawmakers." "Miliband Behind Understanding Between Nawaz And U.S." "The News" (06/01)

"The intensive lobby of UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband was the main reason behind understanding between the US and PML-N Nawaz Sharif. According to the report published in the Sunday Times, David Miliband, the British foreign secretary, persuaded Washington to overcome the US reluctance to deal with him, based on concerns that he was too close to the religious parties."

"India Sees Pakistan As Strategic Partner" "The News" (06/01)

"India saw Pakistan as a potential strategic partner and wanted Islamabad to mend fences with New Delhi, Indian Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna said, offering again to join the hunt with Pakistan for terrorists. 'Whether you refer to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal or our immediate big neighbor China, we have our problems, but we also have our lasting friendship with all of them,' Krishna told the CNN-IBN news channel."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Still A Long Way To Go," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (06/01)

". . . Yet, as top army commanders have opined, military operation is not the solution; it is a temporary remedy. One might interject though that the operation's real challenge, after the terrorists have been routed, lies in hunting down those who have chosen to lie low till the time the troops have withdrawn. In this difficult exercise of differentiating between militants and innocent citizens the help of local residents should prove crucial. And there are reassuring reports that the people are coming forward to identify them.... There is urgent need to repatriate the IDPs if the government wishes to avert a much severer crisis emerging from the camps presently housing them."

"Let Them Eat Cake," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (06/01)

". . . The random and often inappropriate donation and distribution of aid helps nobody and often serves to heighten the sense of loss felt by IDPs. Giving wheat to people who need flour is tantamount to

saying 'then let them eat cake' - which we are sure is not the message that Punjab wanted to give to the IDPs."

"National Resources And Interference Of Foreign Forces," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (06/01)

"Perhaps our rulers have now realized that the present state of affairs owes to the continuous foreign interventions in Pakistan, but they don't have any courage to put the situation right instead of mere rhetoric. It is clear now that the militants in NWFP have the backing of foreign agencies and forces, and Afghan soil is being used as launching pad against Pakistan. It is time to adjust our national policies and liberate the Pakistani nation from the clutches of big powers."

"U.S. War Shifted to Pakistan Now!" an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (06/01)

"Prime Minister Gilani has rightly said that the proposed increase in NATO forces in Afghanistan will escalate terrorism in Pakistan. It is a fact that the U.S. has already moved its 'war on terror' to Pakistan, and now only Pakistanis are losing their lives from both sides whether they are troops or the defiant militants. The civilian casualties are besides these losses. Perhaps, the big powers don't want to end insurgency in this part of the world. If truth be told, they are interested in fanning this uprising, so that those who are opposing their (big powers') agenda remained engaged in their own conflicts."

"The Myth Of A Political Solution," an op-ed by Shahed Sadullah in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (06/01)

". . . The universal unpopularity of America has been used to create the red herring that this is America's war when the fact is that Swat, Buner and North and South Waziristan are not located in the US but in Pakistan and the people the Taliban were killing in these areas are Pakistanis and Muslims. To say that this situation would not have arisen if the US had not attacked Afghanistan is neither here nor there, for Pakistan could not have done anything to influence American decisions in Afghanistan. The only course for Pakistan is to take the situation in Afghanistan as a given, and to see what is the best it can do for itself under the circumstances. Not taking action against the Taliban is not an option."

"More Successes In Military Operation," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 25,000) (06/01)

"Dialogue could be held only if militant groups surrender. Recent history proves that whenever a peace deal was struck, the militants utilized it to increase their power and to open up a new war front. The option of talks cannot be considered till complete success of the military operation. We would like to tell America that if it wants to help Pakistan against extremists then it should reconsider drone attacks. This is a cause of satisfaction that American CENTCOM Chief General Petraeus has admitted on record that American drone attacks caused large scale innocent deaths which led to much decrease in the support for America."

"See-Saw Of Pak-Afghan Battle," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (06/01)

". . . President Barack Obama may be thinking of an exit strategy but he also plans to more than double the number of US forces in Afghanistan to 68,000 troops by the end of 2009, up from about 32,000 in 2008. Pakistani strategists think that only 200,000 to 300,000 American troops will deliver Afghanistan; anything short of that will make a mess of the war, pushing more Taliban fighters and refugees into Pakistan. Therefore Pakistan is in there for the long haul. It wants to tackle the menace of the Taliban piecemeal, relying on the public opinion in its favor, without being faced with more Taliban militants from across the Durand Line."

"What Do They Want," an op-ed by Syed Mansoor Hussain in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (06/01)

". . . In this connection, I have often asked many of my friends that have a soft corner for the Taliban about what exactly the Taliban want within Pakistan. Other than anti-Americanism and some vague mutterings about Shariah law, nobody has been able to answer my question in a satisfactory manner. As far as the talking heads on TV are concerned, they are entirely clueless. The Taliban do not fit into either the ideological or the civilization paradigm of conflict and thus essentially negate both the Fukuyama and the Huntington points of view. Or perhaps they really stand for nothing and are just a 'rabble without a cause.' That might then be why, in the crunch, most Pakistanis have come out in support of the army action against them."

"Fight To The Finish," op-ed by Moazzam Husain in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (06/01)

". . . Our God is benevolent, not angry and vindictive. Whilst proud of our homeland we are also citizens of a larger world that offers us opportunities to realize our larger aspirations. We can understand that the presence of American forces in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 may have stoked your feelings, but today, your declaring jihad against your enemies, sitting on our soil outrages us. 'We are a nuclear-weapons state; we are proud of our military and our courageous people. We have friends around the world. We can look after our interests. We do not need you to fight for our causes. If you must fight for yours, then please go elsewhere. Take your foreign fighters and please leave. We ask you to leave and go find a home somewhere else.'"

"The Battle For Pakistan," an op-ed by Javed Hussain in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (06/01)

". . . The Taliban insurgents essentially are mountain fighters. When they come under pressure they withdraw into the mountains, their safe haven. But when these are denied to them they become vulnerable. Mountains therefore, constitute a key terrain for them as well as for the army. If the heights are secured by landing helicopter-borne troops on them, the insurgents in all probability would be forced down into the valleys, thus exposing themselves to pre-positioned units of the army. But if this doesn't force them down, a downhill attack would. Unless the insurgency is defeated in the tribal areas of Pakistan, the insurgency in Afghanistan will not be defeated. Therefore, it would be in America's interest to provide the requisite number of troop-carrying helicopters and infantry's night-vision devices to the Pakistan Army and to redeploy their forces to make it difficult for the Afghan insurgents to cross into the tribal areas."

Patterson